

THE ECOTHEO REVIEW

Exploring Ecotheology

Toward a Christian Theology of Creation

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Abstract

A Christian perspective on God's relation to Creation necessarily informs our understanding of humanity's relationship to the world in which we live. Through time and across Christendom, voices from Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Anglican, and reformed traditions offer a broad and holistic approach to embracing a Christian theology of Creation. A close examination of Scripture, as a starting point, provides an understanding of humanity as having been created for the purpose of tending and caring for Creation as a whole. Journeying beyond Scripture into the Apostolic Age and beyond, a survey of voices within the Church guides the inquirer towards a panentheistic relationship between God and Creation, and therefore, a sacramental understanding of all Creation. A panentheistic view of God (and Scriptural mandates to care for Creation) are not isolated from the rest of Christian theology, but rather are intrinsically tied to the Eucharistic and Incarnation theologies of the Christian faith.



“We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible,” begins the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, the basic statement of Christian faith formulated in the fourth century at the first and second ecumenical councils.¹ These opening words establish a fundamental relationship between God and Creation, namely that God is the Maker or Creator of all—of both the earthly realities of the mountains and minerals, seas and streams, creatures and cobwebs, as well as the heavenly realities that remain mostly veiled to us. Because of this relationship, we cannot regard or relate to Creation, earthly or heavenly, without recognizing and affirming its relationship to God. To ignore this relationship, while relating to either God or Creation, would be akin to a priest ignoring one partner or another during a marriage or union ceremony. Examining this relationship between God and Creation is at the core of a developed Christian *ecothology*, or theology of creation. As explained in the document *A Catechism of Creation: An Episcopal Understanding*:

A theology of creation presents the Church’s thinking about the relationship between God and the world as it is informed by understandings of Holy Scripture and observations of nature. It seeks to express in human language the mysteries of this relationship. It is not a theory about the universe but a doctrine about the God who creates it.²

An understanding of God’s relationship to the world will affect how we, a part of Creation, relate to the rest of the world—the birds and beasts, forests and flies, winds and waters. Therefore, let us examine both of these facets of *ecothology*, namely, God’s relationship with Creation and the effect it has on our own relationship with the world.

1 J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds* (Continuum International Publishing Group, London: 2006), 297.

2 The Episcopal Church Committee on Science, Technology, and Faith, *A Catechism of Creation: An Episcopal Understanding* (Available from <http://www.episcopalchurch.org/documents/CreationCatechism.pdf>, Accessed 1 November 2008), 7.

“Sacred writings are bound in two volumes, that of creation and that of holy scripture,” writes Thomas Aquinas.³ Let us first look towards the sacred wisdom revealed in the scriptures, and then that which is revealed in and through Creation. In his letter to the Romans, Saint Paul writes, “For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God.”⁴ This verse denotes that the “children of God” are inextricably linked and related to the *shalom*—the wellbeing, peace, and wholeness—of all Creation. One does not eagerly long for something dreadful or insignificant, but rather something hopeful, life-giving, or exciting. Somehow the revelation of the children of God is linked to hope for Creation. Indeed, this is at the very heart of ecotheology.

In Genesis, our duty to care for and protect the earth is made quite clear, yet so often this account is read in another theological manner. Many insist that the earth was given for humans to subjugate and control. These ideas derive from the creation account in Genesis. “God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth *and subdue it*; and *have dominion over* the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth’” (Italics mine).⁵ This verse has been used to teach that the earth is given to humanity to use for its own purposes, to control, suppress, and dominate, that *we* might be fruitful, in accord with God’s command. Sadly, this mentality has resulted in violence to the earth, and abusive use of the of the earth’s resources leading to extinction of thousands of species, depletion of resources, and possibly irreversible damage to the waters and atmosphere. Dominican theologian and monastic, Sarah Ann Sharkey, O.P., argues that these terms have been misread and used contrary to their very meaning in the Hebrew.

The command to ‘subdue’ (*kabas*) Earth focuses particularly on cultivation, a difficult task in ancient days. ‘Subduing’ involves development in the created order. This process offers

³ Sharon Therese Zayac, *Earth Spirituality: In the Catholic and Dominican Traditions* (Boerne, Texas: Sor Juana Press, 2003), 43.

⁴ Rom. 8:19, New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). All Biblical citations will be NRSV unless otherwise noted.

⁵ Gen. 1:28.

to the human being the task of intra-creational development, bringing the world along to its fullest possible creational potential. God's command passes on to humans the responsibility to act on behalf of creation and to work within the boundaries of our humanness, dealing properly with nature in a way that helps bring forth food and values resources. This has nothing to do with abusive control.⁶

In other words, to subdue the earth means to work and tend to the earth in ways such that it might flourish and bring life. Testimonies throughout the scriptures, from the "peaceable kingdom" in Isaiah 11:1-9 to the hope for the restoration of all things (Gr. *apokatastasis*) in Acts 3:20-21, attest to God's reigning intention for the right ordering of *all* creation. It is towards that purpose that humanity is called to "subdue" the earth.

Similarly, to have dominion over the earth does not denote abusive control and power, but rather a rule similar to the dominion that God has over us. As Sharkey writes, "A study of the verb to have 'dominion' (*rada*) indicates that it is associated with royal rule elsewhere in the Hebrew scriptures. As noted above, royal rule, in its ideal exercise, represented God's own rule." She clarifies the key point in making this distinction, "Its goal was to ensure the well-being and right ordering of the life of God's people (especially the impoverished) and the land and all that it held."⁷ Far from condoning an anthropocentric usage of the earth and its resources, in their Hebrew meaning, these verses regard humanity as akin to the stewards of Creation. We are called to work and rule over the earth in the same way a gardener oversees her garden. This argument is even more explicit in the creation account in the second chapter of Genesis. In fact, the intimate connection between humanity and the earth is established in the very action of how humanity is brought into being.

The Creator, a more rural and homey figure than the cosmic God of the first story, fashions the first human from Earth and this relationship is captured in a play on words, '*adam*

6 Sarah Ann Sharkey, *Earth, Our Home: Biblical Witness in the Hebrew Scriptures* (Boerne, Texas: Sor Juana Press, 2004), 34-35.

7 *Ibid.*, 35.

(human being) from ‘*adamah* (Earth)...’*Adam* is forever linked to the other creatures who are formed from the ‘*adamah*.’⁸

Further, God’s intention that humanity would care for the earth is supported by what I would like to call the First Great Commission. “The Lord God took the human and put the human in the Garden of Eden to till it and keep it.”⁹ The verb translated *to keep* is the same used in the Aaronic blessing, “The Lord bless you and *keep* you”¹⁰, and in the psalmist’s verses, “The Lord will *keep* you from all evil; he will *keep* your life. The Lord will *keep* your going out and your coming in from this time on and for evermore” (Italics mine).¹¹ One meaning of this verb *to keep* is that of caring for and protecting. I am emphasizing this, as it conveys the very reason for which God put the human in the garden. Hence, one can argue that a part of our very identity and purpose is to care for Creation, and to neglect this duty is to neglect God’s very own purposes. “If God’s keeping of us means God’s careful, attentive, protective guarding of all that we are and all that we have, then our keeping of God’s world should mean the same.”¹² Associate Professor of Religion at Swarthmore College, Mark I. Wallace, writes that one of his purposes in writing about humanity’s connectedness to the earth is to “recover the rich biblical collection of images and stories about God as an earthen being who sustains the natural world with compassion and thereby models for humankind environmentally healthy ways of being.”¹³ Thus far, in examining Genesis alone, we can see this image of God emerging.

We will return to the testimony and prophecy of the scriptures, but I offer these reflections on Genesis as a basic foundation for a Christian understanding of our place in creation. In the same way that God cares

8 Ibid., 40.

9 Gen. 2:15

10 Num. 6:24

11 Ps. 121:7-8

12 Sharkey, *Earth, Our Home*, 41.

13 Mark I. Wallace, *Finding God in Singing River: Christianity, Spirit, Nature* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2005), x.

for us, we are to be stewards and caretakers of the earth. The curriculum of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, *Awakening to God's Call to Earthkeeping*, offers a term that is quite helpful in articulating this layer of the relationship we are called to foster with regards to Creation:

Earthkeeping is a term being used by many people of faith to describe the nature of our responsibility to care for creation. It springs from our wonder, awe, and gratitude for God's wisdom, creativity, and blessings that fill the natural world. It also grows out of our dismay and concern for the degradations and "groaning" of God's good creation. Faithful earthkeeping involves extending the justice, peace, reconciliation, hope, and love of Christ to all creation. In caring for the Earth, we also deepen our relationship with God and with one another, making our faith more alive and relevant, in and to a broken world.¹⁴

Many Christian denominations have come to recognize that earthkeeping is a fundamental Christian duty. In 1990, Pope John Paul II, in his World Day of Peace message, presented *The Ecological Crisis: A Common Responsibility – Peace with God the Creator, Peace with All Creation*.¹⁵ He asserted that "there is an order in the universe which must be respected, and that the human person, endowed with the capability of choosing freely, has a grave responsibility to preserve this order for the well-being of future generations." He ended the message by calling Roman Catholics to recognize the "serious obligation to care for all creation."¹⁶ Similar affirmations have been made by other church bodies, and in 2002, Pope John Paul II and Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople signed a *Common Declaration on Environmental Ethics* in which they professed, "Among the results of the first sin was the de-

14 Kim Winchell, "Awakening to God's Call to Earthkeeping" (Available from <http://archive.elca.org/stewardship/EarthKeeping/earthkeeping2.pdf>, accessed 2 November 2008), 3.

15 Zayac, *Earth Spirituality*, 22.

16 *Ibid.*, 25.

struction of the original harmony of creation.” In light of this, they declare, “It is [God’s] will that His design and our hope for it will be realized through our cooperation in restoring its original harmony.”¹⁷

Having established this scriptural foundation of humanity’s relationship with Creation as steward and caretaker, let us delve into a consideration of God’s own relationship with the earth as not only Creator, but also as One who is actively present in and through Creation. In the deuterocanonical book of *Wisdom of Solomon* we find an affirmation of God that “you love all things that exist...your immortal spirit is in all things.”¹⁸ It is because of this that “from the greatness and the beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator.”¹⁹ This belief has been affirmed throughout the Church’s history by a vast number of saints, bishops, theologians, and laity alike. Saint Basil, fourth century monastic, theologian, and Bishop of Caesarea, professed that, “The Word of God pervades the creation” and Gregory of Nazianzus affirmed that Christ “exists in all things that are.”²⁰ Likewise, as Sharon Therese Zayac, O.P. writes, “Like the Beguine mystic Mechtilde of Magdeburg (1210-c1280), Dominic,” the founder of the Dominican Order, “saw and knew he saw ‘all things in God and God in all things.’”²¹ These different voices throughout the history of the Church all affirm a belief in a panentheistic relationship between God and Creation. Zayac explains:

Panentheism is the belief that God resides in the world God made, and all creation resides within God who made it since nothing can exist outside of God. Therefore, creation is revered as a worthy gift of a loving and generous God.²²

17 Patriarch Batholomew of Constantinople and Pope John Paul II of Rome, Common Declaration on Environmental Ethics (Rome-Venice: 10 June 2002. Available from http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/2002/june/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20020610_venice-declaration_en.html, accessed 1 November 2008), 1.

18 *Wisd. of Sol.* 11:24, 12:1

19 *Ibid.*, 13:5

20 Matthew Fox, *Creation Spirituality: Liberating Gifts for the Peoples of the Earth* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Pub, 1991), 15.

21 Zayac, *Earth Spirituality*, 46.

22 *Ibid.*, 37-38.

Methodist theologian, Walter Wink, develops this idea, particularly looking at the etymology of panentheism:

In this worldview, soul permeates the universe. God is not just within me, but within everything. The universe is suffused with the divine. This is not pantheism, where everything is God, but panentheism (*pan*, everything; *en*, in; *theos*, God), where everything is in God and God in everything.²³

In 1991, the U.S. Roman Catholic bishops issued a pastoral letter entitled *Renewing the Earth: An Invitation to Reflection and Action on Environment in Light of Catholic Social Teaching* in which they speak of a “sense of God’s presence in nature” and recognize that “through the created gifts of nature, men and women encounter their Creator.”²⁴ In fact, they even go so far as to affirm a “sacramental universe” and a “world that discloses the Creator’s presence by visible and tangible signs,” almost a direct reference to Saint Augustine’s famous definition of a sacrament: “*Sacramentum est invisibilis gratiæ visibilis forma*” (English: “A Sacrament is a visible sign of an invisible grace.”)²⁵

This notion of all Creation as sacramental is quite prevalent in the Church. In the essay *Politics and the Kingdom: The Legacy of the Anglican Left*, theologian John Richard Orens writes about the Anglican priest and pioneer of Christian socialism Stewart Headlam’s view of Creation.

[U]nderlying Headlam’s treatment of the sacraments is a refusal to make a sharp distinction between natural and supernatural grace. Creation itself, he argued, is a sacrament: an outward and visible sign of inward and spiritual grace. Baptism and the Eucharist, therefore, are more than effective signs of the Kingdom; they point to God’s abiding presence in his world. To be a sacramentalist, Headlam insisted, is to

23 Walter Wink, *The Powers That Be* (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 20.

24 John Hart, *Sacramental Commons: Christian Ecological Ethics* (Lanham, Maryland: 2006), 15.

25 P. Pouratt, *Theology Of The Sacraments: A Study In Positive Theology* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2006), 42.

cherish earthly love, beauty, and fellowship, and to reject puritanical other-worldliness.²⁶

Basically, Headlam (1847-1924) espoused a deep incarnational theology that embraced all of Creation as sacramental—as intended to and capable of revealing and bestowing God’s grace. These values undergirded the movement and theologies of Christian socialism to follow. One disciple of this teaching was Anglican priest and member of the British Socialist Party, Conrad Noel. Orens explains, “To be sure, like Maurice, Headlam, and the early Greek fathers, he stressed God’s immanence. ‘God is *perpetually* ‘intruding’ himself into this world,’ he explained, ‘and is himself its very Substance. Every wayside flower is a sacrament of his Body and Blood.’”²⁷ It was Archbishop William Temple, in fact, who first articulated the concept of a “sacramental universe” in his book *Nature, Man and God* (1934), though we undoubtedly see how the foundation of this cosmology dates back even to the Church fathers of the fourth century, and spans throughout the history of the Church.

Not only have Roman Catholic bishops formally affirmed the sacramental nature of all Creation, but Anglicans have done so as well. “The divine Spirit is sacramentally present in Creation, which is therefore to be treated with reverence, respect, and gratitude,” states one affirmation from the Lambeth Conference 1998, a gathering of the archbishops and bishops of the entire Anglican Communion.²⁸ In this one sentence alone, one finds such a high regard for Creation that it is viewed as sacramental. The quote at the beginning of this paragraph is drawn from three affirmations of “the Biblical vision of Creation” listed in Resolution I.8. Section A of this resolution affirms that, “Creation is a web of inter-dependent relationships bound together in the Covenant which

26 John Richard Orens, “Politics in the Kingdom: The Legacy of the Anglican Left,” in Paul Elmen, ed. *Anglican Moral Choice* (Harrisburg: Morehouse Group, 1983), 70.

27 Orens, “Politics in the Kingdom,” 80.

28 Lambeth Conference, Resolutions from 1998, Resolution I.8(a). (Available online: <http://www.lambethconference.org/resolutions/1998/1998-1-8.cfm>), 1.

God, the Holy Trinity has established with the whole earth and every living being.”²⁹ The three affirmations are as follow:

1. the divine Spirit is sacramentally present in Creation, which is therefore to be treated with reverence, respect, and gratitude;
2. human beings are both co-partners with the rest of Creation and living bridges between heaven and earth, with responsibility to make personal and corporate sacrifices for the common good of all Creation;
3. the redemptive purpose of God in Jesus Christ extends to the whole of Creation³⁰

These offer a strong foundation for a thoughtful discussion on ecological concerns as being inextricably linked to our Christian heritage. In one part of the section on environment in *The Official Report of the Lambeth Conference 1998*, the bishops offer an apologetic for a sacramental view of Creation:

Sacramental theology does not divinize nature but affirms the Trinitarian presence of God within creation and points to the natural world and matter itself as an effective medium of divine revelation, a means of communion with God. Nature is “sacred by association.” By the sacramental presence of the Spirit, creation is endowed with sacred value and dignity. It is to be cared for and loved as a vehicle of God’s own presence and revelation.³¹

This sacramental vision of Creation, and of the cosmos, steers us away from a purely anthropocentric approach in which we care for the earth and Creation only because our livelihood and existence depends on the soils, skies, and seas. This anthropocentric rationale, however, is quite prevalent in modern environmentalist efforts, even in the Church, in

29 Ibid., I.8(a)

30 Ibid.

31 The Anglican Consultative Council, *The Official Report Of The Lambeth Conference 1998: Transformation And Renewal July 18-August 9, 1998*, Lambeth Palace, Canterbury, England (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Morehouse Publishing, 1998), 90.

which ecological concerns are presented primarily based on our interconnectedness with natural things. While we are, indeed, called to care and tend the earth, this sacramental perspective challenges the idea of reducing Creation to merely an object that we are to protect and preserve because of our need, and affirms Creation as a subject from which we can learn and even be transformed.

If all of Creation is imbued with God's presence in this profound and sacramental way, one might ask, how then do we understand ourselves as being made in the image of God, for Genesis 1:27 reads, "So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." Denis Edwards, author of *Ecology at the Heart of Faith*, affirms:

Human beings are made in the image of God in the sense that they are made for interpersonal love. A mountain range, a brilliant parrot, a great soaring tree, a delicate wild flower bending in the wind—these two are images of God. They are the self-expression of God, sacraments of divine presence in the world. They image God in their own specificity. But the precise specificity of the human is the personal and the relational, and this involves the human in the vocation to relate to other creatures as God does.³²

This reasoning affirms both the sacramentality of Creation, and acknowledges the distinct nature of human beings in our personal relation to God. We have been given the mandate or commission to relate to Creation in a manner that reflects God's ways.

The Official Report of the Lambeth Conference 1998 acknowledges the obvious link between this sacramental view of Creation and the Holy Eucharist, the sacred mystery that is central to Christian worship.

The Eucharist embodies the conviction, not only that elements of earthly reality—bread and wine—can become means of grace for human beings, but that also, as they are offered

32 Denis Edwards, *Ecology at the Heart of Faith: The Change of Heart that Leads to a New Way of Living on Earth* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007), 17.

up to God by human beings, the elements themselves receive new meaning and status.³³

This ancient act of the Holy Eucharist is, in and of itself, deeply affirming of Creation. These elements of the earth, made from simple wheat and common wine, are believed by Christians to become the sanctifying mystery of Christ's body and blood. In this central liturgical act, God the Son works *in, through, and with* the created matter to sanctify us with His presence. Reflecting on this, the report affirms:

The priestly offering of bread and wine in the Eucharist, then, is itself a microcosm of the wider priestly ministry which human beings exercise in relation to creation as a whole. Human beings may legitimately transform nature, but only in the context of recognizing the natural world as a gift from God, blessed with the capacity to be a sign and means of the divine presence and therefore to be treated with reverence and respect.³⁴

The link between the Holy Eucharist and all of Creation is made explicit, as the bishops of Lambeth point us toward a broader eucharistic approach to Creation as a whole.

Sister Zyac, in *Earth Spirituality*, refers to what she calls "the heresy of dualistic thinking."³⁵ This idea is developed at length in the book *For the Life of the World* by the Protospesbyter Dr. Alexander Schmemmann, former Dean and Professor of Liturgical Theology at St. Vladimir's Orthodox Seminary. He challenges the dichotomies between spiritual and material, sacred and profane, supernatural and natural and argues that "nowhere in the Bible do we find the dichotomies which for us are the self-evident framework of all approaches to religion."³⁶ Schmemmann offers a cosmology in which all of Creation was intended to be eucharistic,

33 The Anglican Consultative Council, *The Official Report of the Lambeth Conference 1998*, 91.

34 *Ibid.*, 92.

35 Zyac, *Earth Spirituality*, 39.

36 Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2004), 14.

and the entirety of our life as communion with God. This resonates closely with the statement from Lambeth in which the offering of bread and wine in the Eucharist is seen as a microcosm of how we are to relate to all of Creation. For Schmemmann writes, “All that exists is God’s gift to [humanity], and it exists to make God known to [humans], to make [humanity’s] life communion with God.”³⁷ It is from this cosmic framework that he examines these dichotomies that have led to a devaluing of Creation and the surfacing of a pseudo-Gnostic approach to the physical world.

Schmemmann affirms that humanity can biologically be identified as *homo sapiens*, namely “wise human” or “knowing human”, and practically as *homo faber*, that is “creating human”, but he argues that our core identity is *homo adorans*— “worshipping human”. “The first, the basic definition of [the humans] is...*the priest*,” writes Schmemmann, identifying his understanding of the fundamental vocation and identity of the human.³⁸ He writes:

[The Human] stands in the center of the world and unifies it in his act of blessing God, of both receiving the world from God and offering it to God—and by filling the world with this eucharist [i.e. thanksgiving], he transforms his life, the one that he receives from the world, into life in God, into communion with Him. The world was created as the “matter,” the material of one all-embracing eucharist, and man was created as the priest of this cosmic sacrament.³⁹

In the Holy Eucharist, the priest takes the gifts of the earth—wheat, grapes, and water—and offers them back to God as a sacrifice of thanksgiving. And in this action, these common items become sacraments revealing and unveiling the Real Presence of Christ in our midst. In the vision that Schmemmann offers, all of us are called into this same eucharistic action in our own lives. In playing music, teaching, harvesting crops, preparing food, parenting, and all our daily tasks, we are called

37 Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 14.

38 *Ibid.*, 15.

39 *Ibid.*

to take the gifts that we are given and to offer our action to God in celebration and love as moments of eucharist (thanksgiving) and, therefore, communion with God.

Edwards affirms this priestly duty of the human in *Ecology at the Heart of Faith*, wherein he writes:

Orthodox theologians rightly speak of human beings as called to be ‘priests of creation.’ They ‘lift up’ creation to God. As part of the community of creation, human beings are to celebrate God’s creation and to praise God on behalf of creation. Their vocation is to love this Earth as God loves it and to delight in the diverse creatures of our planet as God delights in them.⁴⁰

We have examined a scriptural view of Creation as well as a panentheistic understanding God’s sacramental presence therein, but this understanding of the human as *homo adorans* and fundamentally called to a eucharistic life guides us most clearly into a vision of humanity’s role with regard to Creation.

If all that exists was created to be sacramental and we were created in harmony with that Creation, one might ask where things went awry. Schmemmann presents an interpretation of “the fall” that proposes at least a theological response to this question. He writes:

[Humanity] has loved the world, but as an end in itself and not as transparent to God...It seems natural for [humans] to experience the world as opaque, and not shot through with the presence of God. It seems natural not to live a life of thanksgiving for God’s gift of a world. It seems natural not to be eucharistic...The world is fallen because it has fallen away from the awareness that God is all in all...It has accepted the all-embracing secularism which attempts to steal the world away from God.⁴¹

Schmemmann finds this depicted clearly in the story of the fall of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. Considering the forbidden fruit, he points out that since God did not offer that fruit to the humans, eating

⁴⁰ Edwards, *Ecology at the Heart of Faith*, 17.

⁴¹ Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 16.

it was, therefore, “communion with itself alone, and not with God.” As he explains, “It is the image of the world loved for itself, and eating it is the image of life understand as an end in itself.”⁴² In this simple act of turning towards Creation as an end in itself, the human has essentially dishonored the established relationship with God. In this action, the human disregards Creation as a gift from God and takes that which God has reserved to not be eaten. As Schmemmann writes, “The only real fall of man is his non-eucharistic life in a non-eucharistic world.”⁴³ Hence, we are called to recover that eucharistic life— to orient our thoughts and action towards seeing the gifts in Creation that sustain us both spiritually and physically, and rightly honoring these, presenting the entirety of our life and labor to God.

As with any theology, and this is surely the case with a developed ecotheology, the real test of these reflections is how well they are able to guide us outside of the realm of ideas and into effective action. A theology of any integrity must propose and offer at least some element of action in addition to propositions of belief. The Rev. Dr. John Chryssavgis, Orthodox theologian and advisor to the Ecumenical Patriarch on environmental issues, claims that “a spirituality that is not involved with outward creation is not involved with the inward mystery either.”⁴⁴ These reflections, therefore, must bridge involvement with the inward mysteries of the Christian faith with the outward world of Creation in which we live. The Rev. Thomas Berry C.P., historian and ecotheologian, writes:

There is no such thing as ‘human community’ without the earth and the soil and the air and the water and all the living forms. Without these, humans do not exist. In my view, the human community and the natural world will go into the future as a single sacred community or we will both perish in the desert.⁴⁵

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid., 18.

44 Hart, *Sacramental Commons*, 16.

45 Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1988), 43.

In light of all that we have looked at, we must now ask ourselves: *How are we to foster and build up that 'single sacred community' of which Fr. Berry writes?* In approaching this question, let us look back to some suggestions that have come out of the Lambeth Conference, and also The Episcopal Church's *A Catechism of Creation*.

In the middle of the section on environment in the report *Lambeth Indaba: Capturing Conversations and Reflections from the Lambeth Conference 2008*, there is a large italicized heading which reads, "*What can the church do? Take action! Do not wait any longer!*" This report explores actions in five particular areas including Education, Empowerment, Advocacy, Liturgy, and Empowerment for Action. It argues that this issue must be taken to heart and become more than just an "intellectual exercise."⁴⁶ *Education*: The report suggests that educational resources and opportunities must be made available to all—seminarians, clergy, lay leaders, children, youth, and adults alike. Every congregant "must understand that it is their personal responsibility to live a rule of life that sustains and restores God's creation."⁴⁷ *Empowerment*: It is suggested that people 'respond well to specific, simple actions', which ought to be encouraged and modeled, such as planting trees, abstaining from using plastic products, and walking instead of using a car.⁴⁸ *Advocacy*: Bishops are encouraged to network with governments and businesses where "there are opportunities to advocate for change." The report also affirms the importance of interfaith and ecumenical relations. *Liturgy*: We are encouraged to develop and have available resources on environmental issues, and also incorporate environmental awareness into our liturgical life. One suggestion is a "Lenten fast from energy consumption."⁴⁹ *Empowerment for Action*: We are encouraged to consider the economical aspects of earthkeeping, and network with others to lobby for laws and international agreements that seek to preserve life,

46 Lambeth Indaba: Capturing Conversations and Reflections from the Lambeth Conference 2008 (Available from <http://www.lambethconference.org/reflections/document.cfm>, accessed 1 December 2008), 19.

47 Ibid.

48 Ibid., 20.

49 Ibid.

both human and other-than-human. Further, the report suggests, “Bishops need to learn how to exert pressure on governments in regard to environmental issues.”⁵⁰

This report was developed as the compilation of thoughts shared amongst bishops at the Lambeth Conference, and as such, many of these reflections approach the issue from an organizational or ecclesiastical perspective. *A Catechism of Creation: An Episcopal Understanding*, on the other hand, is written in simple question-and-answer format and is more accessible to laity. Some suggestions from the catechism include:

- *We can use fuels, crops and materials for housing, clothing, food, entertainment, and other purposes in a way that sustains these things for future generations and causes as little harm to the earth and other creatures as possible.*
- *We can learn about the great diversity of living things and their environments, and urge our neighbors, churches and governments to become better educated about regional, national and global pressures on the environment.*
- *We can initiate, support and take part in the efforts of individuals, organizations and governments to set aside for both urban and rural residents places of beauty for their natural value and our delight and refreshment.*
- *Those who are able to do so can choose lives of voluntary simplicity, rejecting habits of wasteful consumption and making thoughtful choices for decent living.*⁵¹

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ The Episcopal Church Committee on Science, Technology, and Faith, *A Catechism of Creation: An Episcopal Understanding* (Available from <http://www.episcopalchurch.org/documents/CreationCatechism.pdf>, accessed November 2008), 20.

These are just a few of the many suggestions that are offered in the catechism, but they offer an essential component of a developed ecotheology, for we have come to see that one part of our very identity and purpose is to care for Creation in our actions and daily life. To neglect this duty is to neglect God's very own purposes. In *The Powers that Be*, Wink argues, "When a particular Power becomes idolatrous—that is, when it pursues a vocation other than the one for which God created it and makes its own interests the highest good—then that Power becomes demonic."⁵² According to this reasoning, when the powers of our culture—governments, industries, or social systems—directly conflict with God's will that we care for the earth, we are in fact acting in "demonic" ways. Not only is an examination of the intersection between theology and ecology supported by the Christian faith, but to neglect this area in deed or to reduce it to a secular concern can truly be understood as falling short of God's will for humanity.

Amphilochios of Patmos, a twentieth century Orthodox priest and monk, once said, "Anyone who does not love trees does not love Christ."⁵³ In considering the Nicene-Constantinopolitan profession of God as Creator, Amphilochios' conviction presents the question: *How can a professing Christian possibly honor and love the Creator, if he or she does not honor and love God's Creation?* This question is at the very heart of Christian ecotheology.

⁵² Wink, *The Powers That Be*, 29.

⁵³ Costa Carras and Andrew Walker, eds. *Living Orthodoxy in the Modern World* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2000), 82.